

NEW JERSEY STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

PARTNERSHIPS IN CHARACTER EDUCATION

The responsibility for educating our children and developing their character rests with us all Our schools must also provide a compass to our youngsters, to help them navigate between right and wrong, between fact and fiction, between faithful and false. (Inaugural Address – Governor James E. McGreevey)

Introduction

New Jersey has made an unparalleled commitment to support character education programs in its public schools. Ninety-nine percent of public school districts have initiated character education programs with the help of \$4.75 million in designated state aid to school districts in FY 2001, FY 2002 and FY 2003. This includes Educational Services Commissions and the state facilities serving incarcerated youth, youth at risk and special education students. The funding has been approved with bipartisan legislative support and through the leadership of the Governor. The New Jersey Department of Education is applying for funding under the Partnerships in Character Education grant program to enable the state to (1) create a substantial technical support capability that will promote the continuing development and dissemination of programs based on scientific research in public and nonpublic schools throughout the state; and (2) measure the impact of character education on student attitudes and behaviors in approximately ten collaborating partner demonstration site local education agencies (LEAs). These services will not be undertaken in the absence of the requested federal support, as the state funds are earmarked as state aid to school districts, not for technical assistance or evaluation.

The Department of Education will establish the New Jersey Center for Character Education (NJCCE), located in a state college or university that will be selected on a competitive basis by October 2002. The NJCCE will provide the leadership necessary to facilitate the growth of meaningful, sustainable character education programs based on the latest science. Working with a cadre of highly recognized collaborating partners, institutions of higher education and service providers, the NJCCE will assist school districts and nonpublic schools to infuse character education into instruction and create caring, disciplined school communities that have a profound, positive impact on the lives of students and school staff by integrating core ethical values, such as respect, responsibility and civic involvement, into the fabric of school culture. The main features of the project are as follows:

- The governance and monitoring of the proposed project will be maintained by the Department of Education, through an Advisory Board and an Evaluation Expert Panel. The Advisory Board, which includes educators, parents, and community-based organizations has been established and has had input into the design of the planned activities. A special youth subcommittee of the Advisory Board has been established as well, representing a broad range of student-led organizations and interests. (See Narrative Section 4.)
- Approximately ten collaborating partner LEAs, representing the diversity of NJ schools, students and experiences with extensive school reform efforts, will serve as the focus of intensive program development and evaluation efforts and as best practice demonstration sites. The three State-Operated Districts (Newark, Paterson, and Jersey City) will serve as designated

collaborating partner demonstration sites, based on their successful participation in the earlier SEA grant program and the progress each district has made in utilizing different research-based strategies in developing their approaches to character education. An additional seven LEAs will be selected competitively by October 2002 (see the draft selection criteria in Appendix K.).

- The existing New Jersey State Character Education Network of more than 600 LEAs, and 1400 public and nonpublic educators, parents and community members will receive expanded support and leadership to assist them in increasing the breadth and depth of their services, utilizing state aid and private sector resources.
- The NJCCE will provide the technical support, professional development, consultation, and evaluation capability for work with the collaborating partner LEAs and the State Network, through the creation of a collaborating service provider system featuring national and state leadership organizations including the Character Education Partnership and the Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning, institutions of higher education, the New Jersey Commission on National and Community Service, and science-based program providers such as the Social Decision Making/Problem Solving Program and the Responsive Classroom.
- The NJDOE and its staff, in consultation with the Advisory Board and Evaluation Expert Panel, and utilizing reports submitted by the NJCCE, will summarize the impact of the project on character education in New Jersey.

The results of the expanded program and evaluation activity will be highlighted on the New Jersey Character Education Partnership Web Site, as well as through publications, through on-line professional development courses and conferences.

Over the four-year grant period, the New Jersey Department of Education will provide the basis for an ambitious experiment in marshalling state and federal resources and utilizing the best program development resources and researchers and program evaluators with experience in character education and social-emotional learning to demonstrate the effectiveness of character education in promoting student development and its contribution to school success.